

Pennsylvania sign painters do good work until time comes to setting the arrow. Signs going to the summit of "Lookout Peak" point toward the dropoff at "Angel Falls." At \$35 to half-sole a pair of boots and the same amount of dough to top off a gas tank, the cheapest way to get around the state is to hire a guide. Just be sure he's not connected to the state's highway department, or you may be added to the missing person file.

To find the highway from Erie back to Pittsburgh going through small towns, we first needed directions to leave Erie. A lady overhearing my request in a drugstore offered to lead us from town, saying: "It's only four miles over 127." Made me ashamed to remember all the lost truck drivers and wandering fossil fuel miners I'd sent off from the ranch bearing curt directions. (Mother always cooked breakfast for strays when she lived at the ranch.)

Once on the right highway, we kept the map open to be sure to pinpoint a 45,000-acre state park. We passed the park gate twice before an old boy running a front-end loader told us the entrance sign stood under a grove of chinaberry trees. Parked next to the sign saying, "One mile to covered bridge and waterfall," we unloaded in a light rain down a trail leading to the sound of rushing water. The trail wound across round stepping stones covered in lichen and coated in mud, perfect for a sprained hind leg or a knocked-down hip. At the eight-tenths of a mile sign, we turned back in a

heavier rain. Two miles down the road, we crossed the covered bridge below a waterfall. The park sign at a fork pointed "5 miles to Highway 127." By making a U-turn, we backtracked four miles to Highway 127.

The next destination was the Cook Forest Virgin Timber Area. I wasn't worried about finding the forest as the white pines and poplars are virgin growth, three to four feet in diameter and 200 feet tall. My partner, however, chose to stop at a park office for oral directions. She picked the right ranger. At the end of a mile walk, we stood spellbound in a stand of giant pines and poplars thought to reach back to the drouth of 1644. (No surprise to a shortgrasser that a drouth would be remembered for 367 years.)

We ate our lunch on a fallen log from a once-crashing summer storm. Piliated woodpeckers, hidden but distinct in presence, tapped a staccato of "Woody Woodpecker" tunes interrupting the sound of far-off rapids. Black barred yellow chipmunks waited for crumbs. The sterile ground lay deep in layers of cones and needles. Lying on my back looking up, using the triangulation shadow method from the Boy Scout manual to measure the height of a tree, I calculated the tallest pine to be 200 feet, or approximately seven times taller than the tallest tree in the shortgrass country. Doesn't really matter, because if we were to plant a white pine tree, the scrub mesquites would choke it out before it was five feet tall.

Leaving the forest, the rent car's day rate ended and switched to an hourly charge. At 26 bucks every 60 minutes, we set a straight course to the Pittsburgh car rental agency, arriving in time to be swept off the sidewalks by throngs of baseball fans headed for the stadium.

We'd seen our first big league ballgame earlier in the week. The most exciting part of the game was watching the fans eat foot-long hotdogs. Hotdogs cost 35 cents an inch, or \$4.20 each. If every one of the 26,000 ticketholders ate a hot dog, and each one contained 30 percent beef, the legal amount to call a hot dog a beef hot dog, we were in on 7200 feet of the action, or six ounces of beef times 7200. (I can't give the answer to  $7200 \times 6$  without outside help.)

After I saw how much Pittsburgh baseball fans like hotdogs, I brought the couple running the bed and breakfast where we stayed before going to Erie, a package of hotdogs from a special packer in Erie as a present. They are called "Smith Frankfurters," and Mr. Smith hasn't learned to stuff 70 percent oatmeal into his sausages. But had I known our former hosts planned to farm us out to another "B and B" upon return, I'd have saved my hotdog money to buy a quart of milk to dissolve the sugar on the stale sweet rolls served for breakfast at the new place. No one, however, has ever claimed half the people can outsmart the travel game even half of the time. Next trip, I'll hold off on the presents until I can calculate the rewards.